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THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

Vol. IX—No. 4 LEHIGH UNIVERSITY — BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA April, 1947

Ph. D. Reform

My dear Mr. Fitzhugh:

I applaud your recent number with three excellent articles on the Ph.D. situation, which do not stop, as so many criticisms do, with general principles. I may record, in support of the argument for more critical and esthetic training for teachers of English, an episode in my own experience. I once gave an experimental course in Literary Criticism to fifteen or sixteen selected graduate students. All went well until I left history and began to test-practice by giving to my students for criticism poems and prose extracts of various periods and widely differing degrees of merit. Poetry and prose were printed without indicated authorship. The result was complete confusion. Errors were made of one hundred years and more, and the estimates of relative quality appalled the students when they found what their judgment had recorded. Such a test is, of course, difficult for anyone. What impressed me was that my students, though most of them were of mature age, had never faced it nor apparently had ever expected to face it, and certainly nothing in their training had prepared them for it.

Henry S. Canby

Another Member Writes:

"And Mr. Malone's dainty demonstration of how to hemstitch an issue without really touching it is a true diversion"

What I Like

What I like about the NEWS LETTER is that though it will never have much effect on students, it really does something toward educating teachers. Of all teachers I have ever known, and I've known many, perhaps teachers of "English" know least of how their subject began and for what it is intended.

The poor English teacher, how easily belabored and how rarely thanked! Somehow I remember that wonderful passage in *Ecclesiastes* (ix, 15), "Yet no man remembered that same poor man!"

Christopher Morley

MIDDLE ATLANTIC CEA MEETING

On Saturday, May 10, at 11:15 A. M. (D.S.T.), the Middle Atlantic Section of CEA will meet at the University of Baltimore, 842 N. Howard Street, Baltimore, Md.

The Program: Panel Discussion "The Preparation of Students for Graduate Study." Participants: Elizabeth Nitchie, Goucher; Guy A. Cardwell, Univ. of Md.; Kirby Neill, Catholic Univ.; F. E. Lutz, Catholic Univ., Moderator.

Luncheon: Sherwood Hotel, W. Monument Street, following meeting. Price for luncheon $1.25.

T. F. Marshall, Secretary
Western Maryland College

Junior Membership $1.00

Professor Paul M. Reynolds has suggested that CEA bring future teachers of college English into the professional fellowship while they are undergraduate majors and graduate students. In response to Professor Wheeler's suggestion, the College English Association makes two tentative and experimental offers.

(1) A Junior Membership, without vote, open to undergraduate majors in English and to graduate students in English and General Literature. Graduate students teaching half time or less will be eligible for Junior Membership. Dues for Junior Membership, including subscription to the NEWS LETTER, will be $1.00 annually.

(2) An invitation to regular members to form Affiliate Junior Groups of Junior Members. An Affiliated Junior Group must be under the sponsorship of a regular member who will be responsible for the group and who will conduct all of the group's business with the officers of the national organization. The business of such groups will be discussion of the problems of undergraduate English. The NEWS LETTER will be glad to publish brief accounts of their activities.

The Association's permanent policy toward Junior Memberships and Affiliated Junior Groups will depend on the response to the present offers. It is hoped that the response will be strong. When experience has accumulated, it will be presented to the Directors, who will make recommendations to the regular membership.

Appropriately, the first Affiliated Junior Group has been formed at Winthrop College, Rock Hill, South Carolina, under the sponsorship of Professor Wheeler.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN . . .

Dear Mr. Fitzhugh,

You ask, in your very kind letter, whether "C. E. A. was my idea alone, and just how did the whole thing begin." There really isn't much to tell, but here it is.

The idea emerged just by chance in a correspondence I had with Burges Johnson. For years we have written each other now and then about anything that happens to be on our mind, and this time I spoke with some indignation about my experiences at a convention of one of the older associations, ending by declaring that it was time college English teachers had an organization and publication of their own.

Burges replied that we had too many organizations and publications already. And so the subject lapsed for a time. And then, to my amusement, he wrote me about some of his experiences at a convention. He had evidently come round to my view, and immediately our correspondence on the subject became animated and frequent; the upshot being that we in the end almost dared each other to start something.

We began by sounding out opinion in various quarters, and had an encouraging response; we formed the committee which signed the first circular letter; Burges approached Percy Long, of MLA, and we were generously invited to call a meeting at the time and place (New York) of their annual meeting; and Burges and I met and planned strategy. But we set out for New York really much in the dark about what we intended or hoped to accomplish. Just why I presided at the meeting and he acted as secretary, I don't know. Perhaps we tossed up a coin.

The attendance was remarkable, between three and four hundred being present. It proved an exciting meeting, for organized groups were apparently trying to keep a vote of organization from ever reaching the floor; and I had finally to rule that I would recognize no more speakers unless they spoke definitely on the motion to organize. After that it took only a few minutes, and we adjourned, having accomplished about everything necessary.

You see, it makes no difference whose idea it was. But there is no doubt that Burges, more than anyone else, was responsible for the organization and even the survival of C. E. A. during the first years. My year as president I spent largely in trying to promote the organization of local sections; for the only hope of sustaining a national association seemed to lie in the formation of such groups. I succeeded in forming a flourishing New England section, which held three or four excellent meetings before the war put it out of existence. But later I could give little work to C. E. A., because I became involved in the establishment of the School of English at Simmons, and that was all I could handle.

The inception of the plan was due to our impatience over the subordination of college English to high school English on one hand and university English on the other. Burges and I felt that at that time, in both the conventions and publications, college English was ignored or merely tolerated. At the same time we realized, of course, that college English could not or at least should not be isolated from the other two. We simply felt that it presented important principles and problems deserving separable consideration. I have never changed my mind about that, but have always believed that when C. E. A. became numerous enough, and therefore powerful enough, it could exercise a beneficial influence both upwards and downwards. It has already done so, in fact, if only in forcing upon the older organiza-

(Continued page 4, column 1)

THE NEWS LETTER

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Membership in the College English Association, including THE NEWS LETTER, $2.00 a year. Subscription for Libraries, $1.50.

A NOBLE PURPOSE

Doctor: Come, Professor, let us sit under this magnolia, if it be congenial to you.

Professor: 'Tis the very lotus, doctor.

D: And let us continue our discussion of our profession.

P: 'Tis indeed a topic of frequent discourse among us.

D: Would you not say that teaching youth to communicate lucidly is a noble purpose?

P: 'Tis indeed a noble purpose, and would it were achieved with more than a few.

D: Would you say that it be not given to many to learn this art, or to many to teach it?

P: It cannot be achieved for many, I fear, and then only by most skillful precept, for indeed 'tis a most difficult art.

D: But alas, skillful teachers of the art are few, and are not encouraged.

P: Alas.

D: Lacking them, our noble purposes are naught?

P: Alas, I fear it.

D: The pursuit of false hopes is a vain endeavor.

P: And of vain hopes a false endeavor.

D. Yet to make youth able to communicate lucidly is a noble purpose.

P: Verily it is, and loud the public utcry therefor, yet the youth do resent it exceedingly, and "success in life" seems not to bear much relationship thereto.

D: In truth, the great are not renowned for observance of finesse in rhetoric.

P: If we succeed not, if our students heed us not, if the skill we teach seems of small importance to all but ourselves, and if there be but few skilled teachers thereof, does not our profession seem futile?

D: Does it not?

P: Yet some students wish to be taught. Why not teach them alone?

D: But certainly every college graduate should be able to write correctly?

P: Mayhap he should, but in truth few are.

D: But all should be, and we must do our best.

P: Who sayest so?

D: They

P: Say they not also, that we insist upon highfalutin' writing?

D: What we denominate "good writing" and what they call the same are truly not the same at all.

P: Of a verity, a barbarous jargon contents them, sobeit they commit no 'error'.

D: They ignore the ancient tradition that grammar, rhetoric, and logic are the essence of intellectual discipline.

P: The sacred trivium.

D: A dangerous term, it suggests the trivial.

P: But should not a man who writeth himself B. A. know somewhat of logic and the exact usage of his mother tongue?

D: It is said, may not a man be skilled in a learned profession and be a good citizen, yet have but a passing acquaintance with logic and the niceties of usage?

P: But is it not well for a man to think clearly, to communicate lucidly?

D: Of a certainty, but for how many is it e'en possible?

P: A few only, and they men of wit.

D: Surely you jest; is this not a democracy?

P: Jest or no, the skill you speak of taketh time to develop, not a mere two terms or three. Nor can it be done in isolation.

D: Truly it cannot; nor is it being done at all.

P: May we agree that we force a discipline on all sudents which has meaning for but a few? that only skilled teachers can establish this discipline, but that skilled teachers are few and are discouraged? that success requires time and the cooperation of other university curricula, neither of which we enjoy? and that we see our great labors producing only meagre results? Yet do we insist on our noble purpose and redouble our efforts!

D: All men's suffrage acclaims our efforts.

P: Is there not a sort of frantic comedy in this spectacle?

D: So, indeed, it appears to me.

P: How long, think you, will the public pay to support such a comedy in which it can find little amusement?

D: Hath not society supported greater comedies for centuries and even millenia?

P: But the continuance of such comedies is oft to the benefit of powerful persons.

D: Do not despair, professor. We shall have jobs until we retire.

P: Mayhap, doctor. It is to be hoped.

D: 'T is indeed a glorious magnolia under which we chose to sit, and discuss our profession.

P: 'Tis the very lotus.

ACKNOWLEDGED WITH THANKS

Dear Professor Fitzhugh:

I want to express my very great appreciation for the service which the Appointment Bureau has given me this year. I am no longer an applicant, having an instructorship at . . . . . University. This position was not obtained through the Bureau; but in many ways it is less satisfactory than several to which you were kind enough to refer me. My principle reason for accepting it is that until I have obtained my Ph.D., ... it seems advisable to remain in the vicinity of . . . . . even at some sacrifice in the matter of salary and courses.

In a fairly long experience with appointment bureaus, employment agencies, etc, I have never met with anyone who has taken the pains you have done to suit the applicant to the job. Your evidently warm and personal interest has been most encouraging, especially at this time when the relative ease of placement seems to be making other people careless. I shall very likely be registered again in the next two years or so, and I have great hopes of the help which the Appointment Bureau gives.

The News Letter has been extremely interesting, especially for the discussion of PhD reform. I find myself agreeing with most of what has been said, and most pleased with the sensible and liberal views expressed on all sides. I am most in agreement with those who, particularly in the latest issue, insist on an inclusive integration of all the various aspects of graduate study. The whole program, understood and administered as an organic unit, is the goal toward which I feel we ought to work.

O. S. D.

Vacancies . . .

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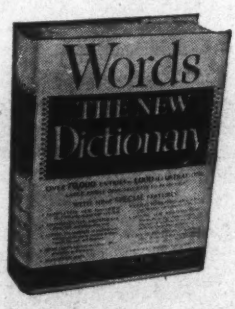

S. I. HAYAKAWA: I am much delighted with *WORDS: The New Dictionary* . . . [It is] comprehensive . . . thoroughly well-thought-out and conscientiously edited. The entire pronunciation key [has] a kind of realism that most dictionaries have yet to achieve.

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I've Been Reading

Members are invited to contribute reviews of books, old or new, which they wish to call to the attention of other English teachers. Professor J. Gordon Eaker, the Assistant Editor, in charge of I'VE BEEN READING. He is Head, Department of English, Jersey City Junior College, Jersey City, N. J.

WORDS: THE NEW DICTIONARY. Charles P. Chadsey, Editor in Chief, William Morris, Managing Editor, Harold Wentworth, Consulting Editor. Grosset & Dunlap, 1947, xxxi & 704 pp., $2.00.

Words defines 70,000 terms concisely and usually clearly, pronounces most of them by simplified respelling, and illustrates 1,000 by line cuts. Auxiliary materials include a section on the use of the dictionary, vocabulary tests, gazetteer (8½ pp.), bibliographical dictionary (13 pp.), maps, secretary's handbook, and "global handbook of essential phrases" in French, Spanish, Russian, German, and Japanese (8 pp.). The last of these seems the least useful.

For students unable to buy larger dictionaries or unwilling to use them properly, *Words* is a bargain. Its clear type, its terse definitions—unencumbered by derivations and usually not requiring cross references—, and its easy pronunciation system should help a student form the dictionary habit.

Although most of the definitions checked seem adequate, brevity is sometimes a handicap. Thus we do not learn that a *cutlass* is chiefly a naval weapon or that *hellbender* and *mud puppy* are both entirely aquatic animals. The definition of *shotgun* is misleading, those of *automatic* (pistol) and *pistol* are inadequate, and the illustration for the last is unfortunate. A second edition will probably correct some errors in zoology. *Words* defines *salamander* as "an amphibious reptile"; *newt*, as "an amphibian of the lizard family." Herpetologists will not like the definitions of *terrapin*, *tortoise*, and *turtle*.

The respelling method is easier for the student than more conventional methods of indicating pronunciation, but that method should be more clearly defined. The selection of words to be respelled is sometimes unusual. The *New Words* list *bobbysocks* and respells *Luftwaffe* but not *Herrenvolk*.

G. S. Alleman
Lehigh University

Report of FRESHMAN ENGLISH CONFERENCE, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY, June 10-14, 1946, Syracuse University Press, 1946, 50 cents.

A hundred English teachers with consultants Wilfred Eberhart, Helene W. Hartley, John C. Hodges, Theodore Morrison, William M. ale, Verna White, and Clarence W. Hunnicutt met and discussed Freshman English for a week at Syracuse last June.

They found that the objective of developing the student's ability to think clearly and to express his thought will be best reached through expository writing and readings chosen to stimulate the student's thinking. Mechanics should be taught to those students whose ignorance of them handicaps their writing. Vocabulary can best be increased by natural assimilation through reading.

Teaching load has a direct bearing on effectiveness of teaching. Composition sections should not include more than 20 students and over-all credit-hour load should not exceed twelve hours a week. Standards of correctness should operate through the entire college program. Correctness of expression is the *initial* requirement for the Freshman English course, whatever else is done besides. Theme correction was judged the most important method of developing good expression. The group disapproved the use of workbooks and exercise books.

Thinking can be stimulated by helping the student to explore his own experience. Discussion of broad areas of interest preceding a class theme might help.

Literature in the freshman course should be taught primarily as a clarification of experience, offering illumination and guidance on the personal problems of the young man or woman facing the contemporary world.

Mr. Morrison suggested the teaching of a good twentieth-century style, which admits some colloquialism. "Americans are too timidly respectful of good form as language for their own good as writers." In grading themes, teachers should make three comments:

1. A summary and explanation of the worst of the symptomatic and representative errors.

2. A response to the content of the theme, so that the student knows that his reader has reacted in some way.

3. Something favorable that can be said about the theme; if this is impossible, an indication of the best parts.

A similar conference is being planned for June 9 to June 19, 1947, probably on a different area of concentration.

J. G. E.

• • •

RADIO DRAMA PRODUCTION. A Handbook by Rome and Walter Krulevitch (Sketches by Wi liam G. Harley) 330 pp. New York, Rinehart and Company, Inc. 1946.

RADIO DRAMA PRODUCTION stands out as one of the most clarifying books on radio drama for practical use in the classroom.

Obviously, the teaching of radio drama calls for certain modifications of professional practice, but the authors of RADIO DRAMA PRODUCTION have successfully met this problem by presenting a series of exercises, scenes, and scripts that are simple enough for beginners, yet comprehensive enough to develop facility in handling the various problems that might arise in actual production.

The authors have done well to use actual typed exercises instead of printed ones, so that the student may become used to the format used in regular radio stations.

The sketches by William G. Harley illustrate helpfully the signs and gestures used in actual radio work.

Both authors are instructors in radio at the University of Wisconsin. Walter Krulevitch is also program supervisor of rado station WHA, and Rome C. Krulevitch is script editor of the same station.

Elizabeth Davis

• • •

PROFESSIONAL RADIO WRITING, Albert Crews, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1946, 473 pp., $3.40.

Radio writing can no longer be neglected by any college. Here is a thin but full book by the experienced chairman of the Radio Department, Northwestern University, on every type of radio writing. It tells how the writer must fill his mind, study his audience, and master his technique through practice. The mechanics of radio writing are fully illustrated, as are music continuity programs. Audience-participaton programs can always be varied, like features and commercials. A whole section is given to radio dramatic writing. The book is a complete reference manual and should be a sufficient guide for any teacher of a course in broadcasting or writing for radio. The last section is an optimistic one on the markets for radio writing. The book is thorough and competent.

J. G. E.

Members are urged to clip and send the editor comments on English teaching and English teachers which they find in their reading.

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How It All Began . . .

(Continued from page one)

tions a recognition of the nature and needs of college English.

Various pressures were brought to make us join MLA or the National Council, but were resisted. Some wanted us to publish a journal of critical essays; others, of scholarly articles; and still others, of classroom methods. We were saved from a decision by lack of funds, although both Burges and I spent a good deal of time consulting publishers, university presses, and printers, and even entered upon some abortive negotiations. All we could do, as regarded a publication, was what we did; launch the *News Letter*, which was Burges' invention, our aim being to produce something alive. It was and is, I think, that. If the final test of a magazine is whether its subscribers read it, the News *Letter* has always stood that test.

Nevertheless, as I have said, our early correspondence had much to do with whether we should try to float a monthly or quarterly, and once we came near attempting it. It was hard to see, however, how to devise a magazine that would not repeat what was already being done in MLA and National Council publications or other literary and critical journals. Besides, Burges was always of the opinion that if anybody has anything to say he can say it in 1800 words; perhaps not an axiom, but still a principle. It has been well illustrated in the *News Letter*.

That the main association has survived the war is a good augury for its future. Certainly there is plenty of work for it to do, and even more reason for faith in its destiny than when it was founded.

Sincerely yours,
R. M. Gay

Contemporary Drama

"A play is a story devised to be presented by actors on a stage before an audience." This simple definition by Clayton Hamilton comprises the sum total of all justifiable criticism that the English Department needs to face for evaluating plays solely from the reading of the dialogue.

Contemporary drama, more than that of any other period, suffers from the stereotyped academic approach of the English Department. If the classics are judged for their literary merits alone, the omission of other aspects is relatively unimportant. In the Elizabethan Age for example, technical aids were few and thus the theatre depended largely on the spoken word for effect. The storm scene in *King Lear* is evoked by means of powerful speeches, which can be properly evaluated in classroom consideration. But only the proper scenery and sound effects can make convincing the metamorphosis of a bold, adventurous Emperor Jones into a fearful, cringing savage.

There are, of course, exceptions. The plays of a frankly literary artist like George Bernard Shaw, or some of the drawing room comedies of a Somerset Maugham are wordy enough to retain character in the mere reading of the dialogue. In the main, however, the present day author keeps in mind the exigencies of the modern theatre and the gathered audience. Directions and lines are geared to the stage so that the written play is sometimes as incomplete and as unrevealing as a cinematographic script.

Yet most English Departments treat all contemporary plays as if they were "closet drama", a reversal from Hamlet in modern dress to Jeeter Lester in a Tory wig. The essentially different quality of the drama, as compared to other forms of literature, is ignored.

If we look at the typical contemporary drama course as taught in the typical college by the typical English teacher, we find that it usually begins with Ibsen, who is conscientiously discussed as "the father of modern drama", and whose "far reaching influence" is retraced in this or that line of this or that subsequent play. The authors of the subsequent plays are too often ignored, however, English teachers failing to give value to judgments of living persons for what is called "lack of the right perspective." As Alexander Woolcott said, "if [the author] is alive and you conduct your research by no more difficult and ingenious process than that of walking down the street and asking him, why, then it just isn't done." The teaching annihilates the personality of the author and the things and thoughts he represents and wants to tell his audience. Instead the plays are viewed with the objective detachment that has for so long characterized the approach of the English Department. A living play thus becomes "history", is classified as realistic, naturalistic, surrealistic or neo-classic, and is then filed away until the following year when it is resurrected with a satisfyingly increasing number of footnotes.

There is no evil intent in such unfair treatment of contemporary drama. It is simply shortsightedness that has prevented the English teacher from looking beyond the narrow encirclement of his four departmental walls. One of the reasons for this is probably the fact that he is part of a small academic community with little access to a theatre. And his teacher too lived in a small academic community and at a time when there was an even greater dearth of theatres. The result is the procreation of one and the same teaching method over many generations. As Norris Houghton puts it, the English Department has been teaching contemporary drama as "they learned it at College C from a man who learned about it at University A from a man who learned it at University B from a man who got it out of a book." It is therefore not the fault or lack of ability on the part of a particular instructor that has caused maltreatment of contemporary drama; the fault lies in the method that has remained unchanged in the tight envelopment of pedagogic detachment.

There are other facts that have strengthened this approach or have at least prevented a change: very rarely are current plays included in the texts and anthologies used by the teacher of drama. Apparently the publisher's risk is too great to permit including what might turn out to be a mediocre play. Economic considerations demand that a drama be critically evaluated by every small town gazette and be generally considered "a classic" before it is acceptable. Hence the anthologies are usually full of "old chestnuts" that to a student are as far removed from today as if they were written a hundred years ago. Unfortunately it is too expensive a project to add currently popular plays to the selection in order to give both teacher and student the realization that what is discussed is living theatre.

Furthermore, consciously or unconsciously, the English Department has been very hesitant in considering anything that is "theatre" and not simply "literature" because of the departmental division that in most institutions places the drama in a separate department or in the Speech Department. The vested interest, so to speak, has prevented the English Department from exploring new methods, fearing that they might weaken the departmental foundation or else infringe on the work of the other two divisions. Therefore it is not unusual for contemporary drama to be taught in one and the same institution at one and the same time in three different ways—each division treating its own approach as a separate and unique discipline. At a time when integration of knowledge is recognized as the foremost obligation of our institutions of higher learning, this hair-splitting attitude on the part of the three divisions stands out as one of the most reactionary blockings in the development of an adequate liberal arts curriculum.

Patterns for Living

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When it comes to the concrete problem of achieving a synthesis, a great many obstacles will undoubtedly have to be coped with. For instance, a university theatre might be perfectly willing to synchronize its activity with that of the English Department in the presentation of contemporary plays. In this event, however, there still remains the gap between the number of plays which can be handled by the two departments: The English Department may discuss as many as thirty plays in a drama course, while at best three modern plays can be presented by the Department of Drama. But if the English teacher has a basic readiness to depart from the beaten path, he should be able to discover ways and means of revitalizing his contemporary drama course. For instance, in the process of the course, several lectures could be assigned to the teacher of theatre arts, who might demonstrate how a scene, perhaps unconvincing and dull in the text, can be made plausible and effective in the production of the play. Considering the fact that 90 percent of all students depend solely on the movies for any theatre experience the challenge ought to be considerable.

But if the English Department is unable or unwilling to try a new approach at least it should define its position and state explicitly that contemporary drama is taught as literature and as literature alone. In any case it should be made to label the course appropriately and call it either "contemporary drama as literature" or "the history of contemporary drama". At least it would then avoid disillusioning many a student who registers for a course in drama without realizing, as Helen Eustis has pointed out, that the English Department is comprised of scientists "obliged professionally to take the dew off the rose and analyze it as H_2O."

Donald Hutchins MacMahon
Georgia State College for Women

Classics at Oberlin

Oberlin College is giving an experimental course aimed to fill in part the vacuum left in general education by the decline of the classics in college. Discovering by means of a study made in the department of Psychology that about thirty-five students enter as freshmen each year with four years of high-school Latin, and about sixty-five with three years, the department of English segregated the four-year students in one section of the composition course. Because of a conflict of schedules, only 12 students could be assigned to this section, and one planned for three-year students had to be abandoned. The course has a strong linguistic emphasis; Latin and English modes of expression are contrasted and compared; and the influence of Latin on English and the long association of the two languages are studied. Our notion is to give a special training to those who came to us already specially trained. So far the students like it.

Donald J. Lloyd
Oberlin College

'All the World's A Circus'

When near a circus my Uncle Frank invariably became philosophical. As we sat on a coil of rope, watching the roustabouts drive stakes for the big-top, or stood in front of the spielers, listening to their descriptions of the freaks, Frank would make sage remarks. I remember the admiration he had for the organization of the Greatest Show on Earth. "All the world's a circus," he would say, "those who don't know the regulations get trampled on. You have to know what's expected of you, and then you have to do exactly that. This piece of rope, for instance,—it's always unloaded from the rear of Wagon 16, and it always goes back into the rear of Wagon 16. You couldn't go hunting around for it in all the wagons; in fact, they'd fire anyone who misplaced it. And notice how the elephants always come in at the same place and go counterclockwise over the same path. If you wandered into their path, you'd be trampled to death. The lion tamer always puts his chair in the cage first and then enters, never the other way around. That's the way they get things done in a circus."

I don't think Frank would approve of the show we teachers of English composition put on. It's very un-circus-like. In the fourth grade of grammar school we tell the young roustabouts how to coil the rope and where to put it. A few learn right off. For the others we repeat the instruction in the fifth grade, in the sixth . . . through high school, and again in Freshman English. By the time the bright student gets to the eighth grade, he's sick of the whole business; the dull ones are quick to catch on: they know that if they don't get their spelling or punctuation or agreement this year, they'll have a chance at it later. Poor workers in high school know that they will repeat everything in college; those in college can look forward to a review and some remedial composition in the graduate school. At present we have not been able to promise any remedial work beyond the graduate level, which, I suspect, must baffle many students.

It is, perhaps, worth speculating on how classes in mathematics would be conducted if the current practices of English teachers were adopted by our colleagues in the sciences. From the 5th to the 8th grades arithmetic would consist very largely of reviewing the multiplication tables,—which many of the students had learned in the 4th grade. Those who didn't know what 9 times 9 was would be passed on anyhow, convinced that in high school their difficulties would find a sympathetic reception. Algebra would begin with a month's review of square roots. Geometry would consist of a review of subtraction and addition; and, later on, calculus would be delayed while the teacher painstakingly went over long-division. The student by this time would know very well that he could put off learning all this stuff until he took his Remedial Calculation in graduate school.

Teachers of mathematics do not act this way, and I think they get better results than we do. They know that little or no calculus could be taught if more than half of the time and energy of the course were given over to the multiplication tables. They run a better circus: there the man who can't put the rope back in No. 16 after he's been shown where it goes a couple of times gets fired; the man who wanders into the elephants' work path gets trampled on, and the lion tamer who forgets his chair loses the seat of his pants, or more. All this is drastic, to be sure, but it is worth noting that as a result of regulations, casualties in a circus are rare. Few workers get trampled by the elephants; few lion tamers are chewed to pieces. And, to return to mathematics, few students in Calculus I have to be flunked because they think the square root of 9 is 81.

Colleges should have the courage to tell a Freshman: You had the mechanics of writing in grammar school and you reviewed it in high school. We have important things to teach you; we can't spend our time going over the multiplication tables of English. If you can't write acceptably, we don't want you. We suggest that you study your high school manual of English and take our entrance examination again next semester.

Under such a big-top there would never be two of the three rings given over to performers trying to spell "receive", recognize a sentence, or capitalize "Friday." The English Show, then billed as having—ALL NEW ACTS—NO OLD TRICKS—would be well worth watching. If that came to pass, College English and the circus would both arouse Uncle Frank's admiration.

George S. McCue
Colorado College

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STERILE?

Every year when the Association of American University Presses meets, it has several groups known as "Work Committees." Unlike committees at some conferences, they do work. One such group at this year's meeting devoted its attention to "List Building and Editing Problems of Scholarly Books in the Humanities and the Social Sciences." The chairman was Helen Clapesattle of the University of Minnesota Press, and taking part in the discussions were the editors of most of the university presses of the country. When they put their report together, this is what they found themselves in agreement on, among other things:

"We have the temerity to suggest that the charge of sterility sometimes leveled at scholarship in the social sciences and the humanities is not without basis in fact, and that this lack of vital relationship to the problems of our society constitutes a fundamental problem in scholarly publishing in these disciplines. Recognizing that the accumulation and presentation of facts are in themselves sometimes of value, we none the less believe that more significant interpretation is needed, more thought, more wisdom, more willingness to take a stand on the facts—*after* investigation, not before. We think it is not too much to ask the scholars, in this of all times in the world's history, that they be also responsible human beings and citizens—not mere academic robots assembling facts and spewing them forth again without interpretive structure or relevance.

"In short, we accept the function of university presses to publish the works of scholarship when they are of good quality. But we reject the notion that we are to be merely the mouthpieces of experts communicating with experts. Our job is to disseminate knowledge — not to assist in hoarding it to satisfy the egos of the esoteric few. Such hoarding is the way of the aristocratic tradition of German scholarship, whose dead hand seems still to rest so heavily upon American scholarship. In a democracy knowledge must be the possession of the people, not of the professors alone. *Pleasures of Publishing*, XIV,7, April 7, 1947

Members are urged not to stifle that impulse to write the editor.

GRASS ROOTS

Why Teach English?

The familiar division of the work of English departments, with a heavy burden of freshman composition and literature courses—taught mainly by instructors and graduate students—, and the regular system of courses for majors—taught by the professorial staff—has long made advancement in the field of English slower than in other departments. The teaching of composition is not usually thought of as fit work for a career or of such nature as, by itself, to merit promotion. The teacher of composition is a college drudge, viewed with sympathy and sorrow by his colleagues in the sciences and social sciences, and waiting for death or retirement (his own or that of the professors) to relieve him of his troubles. Having drifted into his predicament because of his love of reading good literature, he occupies himself with the ineptitudes of unwilling writers, mostly timeservers also, but on a slightly lower level.

The present influx of students has increased the number taking composition (one hundred sections is not uncommon these days), but not yet the number of majors, and more and more people with less and less training and aptitude for the work are being drawn into the teaching of freshman English, each with less chance of advancing away from it than ever before. Some schools, pressed by need, have moved the agony up a notch: assistant professors are now being hired 'on probation,' to hover in insecurity for three years as instructors and teaching fellows have always done. Or 'associate professors' are appointed—with eighteen hours of teaching as their load. What is properly a highly individual and personal art is regimented under 'directors of Freshman English,' and classes of thirty or more students advance in lockstep through drill-books of classified errors.

Now I submit that until proper salaries and reasonable assurance of advancement in rank are offered to the teachers of Freshman English, the whole field of English will not attract bright young men and women, and without young men and women of distinguished character and ability it is futile to outline ideal courses of preparation.

Donald S. Lloyd
Oberlin College

Teacher Load in Composition

What are or shoud be acceptable criteria for teaching load and class size in freshman English and in Advanced Composition?

Agreement on an answer would be useful; hence, as a provocative start, I submit the following generalizations on present practice, based on a sampling questionnaire sent out in the fall of 1946 to some 20 state universities of the middle west and west, nearly a dozen privately endowed colleges, and a half dozen state colleges of agriculture. Teachers' colleges, junior colleges, and branch colleges of state universities have not been included, but limited evidence indicates that these schools tend to assign a heavier load (e.g., 15-18 hour teaching load, 25-50 in the freshman class), a few to the point of doubtful collegiate efficiency. In a general way, the standard A and M college parallels the state university, but with a little more crowding shown by the over-all average. Endowed colleges range more widely both above and below the norms set, depending, no doubt, on pressures on the budget and the plant.

The following norms seem to be reasonably reliable criteria in the two fields mentioned. They are, obviously, subject to revision and comment.

Teaching load. Both ideally and actually, 12 hours appears to be the standard load for instructors of English. A few fortunate schools may hold to the nine-hour teaching load for freshman composition; and others endeavor to assign at least three hours of the twelve to a class in literature. Not many standard schools advocate a 15-hour load.

Students per teacher. Ideally, the freshman teacher will handle from 60 to 100 students. Actually, the figure is nearer 80 to 120; some run more, even to 150 and above. Diminishing returns follow upon the attempt to carry more than about 110 students in composition.

Class size in freshman English. Ideally, the class size in freshman composition is 16 to 22, not over 25. Few schools would advocate over 25, where the teacher is responsible for grading and the individual conference. Actually, many freshman classes now run to 30, 35, and even 40. Overcrowding is evident under present pressures, but schools endeavor to keep 30 as the emergency maximum, and to retain 20-25 as the normal maximum.

Class size in Advanced Composition. Ideally, the class size for Advanced Composition, including Creative Writing, is from 12 to 18, not over 20. Actually, the figure at present is nearer 15 to 25, and even 30.

Additional factors. It is generally recognized that serious criticism of papers takes time, and that the individual conference is all but imperative, but that neither is given sufficient consideration in the general estimate of the teacher's program. Genuine student

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accomplishment is one thing, and mass accrediting in freshman English another. The English teacher, like any other, needs also frequent intellectual rejuvenation; and the harassed teacher who can find neither time nor energy for productive reading soon ceases to be a productive teacher.

Wilson O. Clough,
Chairman, Department of English.

Attention English 0!

I believe that teachers should expend their best efforts on gifted students, so that standardized tests do not continue to betray a retrogression in the upper percentile ranks; nevertheless, for the past ten years I have been rather consistently interested in the problems of failures. Although my experience has been limited to schools in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Tennessee, and California, I gather from comments in the *News Letter* that my findings are typical of difficulties throughout the country. During my recent study of failures at Vanderbilt University and my current project at Ward-Belmont College, three questions have persisted: What is the dividing line between failing and passing? Why do students fail? What can be done to prevent students from failing?

To the first question I confess I have no answer. At least three different studies at various institutions have shown that it is possible for one theme to be graded on all levels from A to F by members of the same department. In the Freshman English Department at Vanderbilt University, however, a conscious effort has been made to maintain a uniform standard of grading. This is a very important consideration, because while it is disconcerting to realize that one may be failing a student who would go merrily on to success if he were in another class, it is even more disconcerting to send him along to the very exacting requirements of subsequent course without adequate preparation. Oddly enough, for one student disgruntled over an unfair F, an overwhelming number are complaining of having earned A's and B's in preparatory schools "without learning anything."

Whether fairly or unfairly, an average of fifteen to twenty percent of the freshmen in representative colleges and universities fail in English. Considering that most of them have used the language all their lives, this is an outrageously high percentage. Why do they fail? In a class predominatly of veterans, I found three reasons for failure: physiological ailments, psychological disturbances, and purely academic shortcomings. The purely academic problems are the only ones which the average instructor can be expected to remedy, but he should be able to recognize the others and promptly refer them to the physician or counsellor. These academic failures include a very large number of students who have never learned to read. It is a miracle of intelligence that they have ever arrived at college.

To keep failures at a minimum, the instructor has three time-worn responsibilities: diagnosis, motivation, and instruction. The aptitude test score will indicate the probable success of each student, and the achievement test score will show whether or not the student has been succeeding to capacity. If he seems to have exceeded his native ability, it is reasonably certain that he has been learning by rote or by looking over somebody else's shoulder without comprehension. In such a case the instructor's task will be to determine the reasons for failure before he can correct them. I find it helpful to keep case studies of each student in a card index in which I record informal observations and questionnaires calculated to unearth everything from incomplete recoveries from sleeping sickness to the malign influence of over-fond mothers who have always prepared their child's assignments. I keep a sample of extemporaneous writing in order to determine the degree of retardation for each student. Conferences are also important in determining such matters as the extent to which timidity is responsible for failure. A more detailed diagnosis may be made by tabulating errors made in tests and themes by each individual and a composite of the class by tabulating the frequency of various types of difficulty. If the average of the group is low, and if the standard deviation is not great, an entire class may be given the same remedial instruction; otherwise it should be borne in mind that many a brilliant student has failed from sheer boredom with procedures below his level of ability.

The evidence gained from the diagnosis should be tactfully imparted to the student privately in order that he may know what he needs to do to improve. Students frequently fail because they do not understand the purpose of the course or of the individual assignment. In fact, it has been rumored that English teachers themselves have not aways been able to justify the content of their courses. Time spent in defining the ends to be achieved and in analyzing the procedures necessary to the attainment of those ends is time well spent. The fact that much of the activity of the world is purposeless and unrewarding is no reason for perpetuating such habits in our schools.[1].

1. The nature of the instruction depends on the group. Mrs. Pope writes in a letter, "Almost any method works if the diagnosis is carefully made (and used)."

It is really impossible to teach a heterogeneous group of failures satisfactorily with an inflexible syllabus, although many administrators still require teachers to do so. However, I have found certain drills on characteristic language difficulties useful in many different groups. I prepared these by tabulating the frequency of errors and supplying corrective instruction for the most prevalent ones. The less common ones may be best handled in conference. In addition to remedial work in correctness, it may be necessary to supply easier explanatory material for some of the regular lessons in composition. This is especially true if the text in use is on the post-graduate level of difficulty, as bright student discovered parts of ours to be. (The Flesch Reading Scale is a useful device for detecting such interesting facts as this.) Students can often make satisfactory progress without benefit of tutors or help sections if they have access to materials on their level of comprehension.

On the other hand, I am convinced that some people positively cannot learn language arts in the usual way, that is, by reasoning about them. Such language habits as they have, they have learned by imitation. If the models have been faulty, their speech habits are faulty. The correction of these habits, if it is to be undertaken at all, must be effected by the tedious process of unlearning the wrong forms and substitutting correct ones by some such device as tthe dictation method I described in *College English* for December, 1942. I have used this method with invariable success, but whether a college should attempt such pedagogy in the interest of potentially successful students must be decided locally. Many administrators feel that it is an affront to the dignity of a college to offer remedial measures in college, even if by so doing they raise the quality of work done throughout the department.

(Continued page 8, column 1)

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The influx of veterans has made it imperative to provide refresher courses at Vanderbilt, and the results during three quarters have more than repaid the department for the effort. Whereas we had every right to expect a sharp increase in failures, failures dropped from twelve and a half percent in the fall of 1945 to a phenomenal low of five percent in the fall of 1946. This figure is doubly significant because the average aptitude of the 1945 entering class was considerably higher than that of the 1946 group, newly returned from four years of anything but drills in grammar. Furthermore, there has been a subsequent fifty-percent decrease in failures in the work of the second-quarter students who had the benefit of help sections in the lower tenth percentile during the first quarter.

A follow-up of the influence on the grades of students who have received remedial help shows that there is a proportionately much higher rate of failure among students in the eleventh and twelfth percentiles, who did not receive the special attention, than there was among the poorer students below the tenth percentile, all of whom were enrolled in help sections. Specifically, although forty-six percent of all students below the tenth percentile were in my two help sections, only twelve percent of all the failures came from that group. Thirty-one students in all failed the first quarter's work, but only thirteen were originally in the lowest tenth percentile, which numbered ninety-four students. Ten failures were in the distribution between the eleventh and twentieth percentiles—all enrolled in the regular courses only—although there were only fifty-two students in that distribution.

One of the most beneficial aspects of a remedial program is that it makes instructors conscious of efficiency. An examination of test norms shows that an average of only seven or eight percentile points of improvement are discernible during high school years; and from the spring of the senior year to the fall of college entrance, there is usually a regression of about three percent. It is no wonder, therefore, that when teachers learn how to enable their classes to improve as much as thirty-five percent in one quarter, they are renewed in their conviction that teaching is indeed a noble profession.

Myrtle Philman Pope
Ward-Belmont College

A Question

Dear Professor Fitzhugh:

The *News Letter* is a vigorous, thought - provoking publication whose every issue is a stimulus to to renewed effort in the fight against stereotyped teaching. As a forum in which the best ideas in the field are aired, I find it invaluable.

A question that has been uppermost in my mind for some time is this: Has there been any organized movement, either within the College English Association or elsewhere, to promote research into the causes of the illiteracy unfortunately too common among high school graduates? Admirable though the many ideas for training college freshmen and sophomores are, it strikes me that the college English departments have a particular responsibility in bringing about reform in the teaching of the language arts in the public schools. So far, curriculum construction and determination of the certification requirements for teachers has been left largely in the hands of Education departments and administrators in the public school system. Isn't it about time that we assumed the responsibility of doing something about a fact which we all deplore—namely, that the language arts are ineffectively taught in the public schools? Should we go on indefinitely conducting freshman courses that are largely remedial English— whatever their titles and professed purposes? Isn't it about time for us to seek the cause of the disease, rather than merely treating the symptoms — namely, the freshmen?

John B. Shackford
Ball State Teachers College
Muncie, Indiana

Two Choices

Not the least interesting aspect of English is that no one has ever found out how to teach it, but the methodologists are ever busy. Hoping perhaps for the perfect solution, they call loudly for basic English, semantics, reading tests, literary appreciation, more themes or fewer, or any other sort of pedagogical mechanics which promise to make literates out of illiterates in eight months. Indeed, any one who is not a pursuer of method for its own sake hesitates to add his voice to the hubbub.

Still, the choices of method in the practical teaching of composition reduce themselves to two. A teacher can either begin with the details and work forward to general principles or lay down the fundamentals and then proceed to details. Any teacher faced with his first batch of vague, ill-spelled, grammatically uncertain themes from the average class of freshmen is tempted to follow the former method. If he does adopt it, he labors mightily with usage and tenses, with the proper placing of the comma, and difference between *affect* and *effect*. And the moment is bound to come when the teacher realizes that he is teaching his students to do grammatical tricks and that, like performing dogs, they have not the slightest idea that these activities have any real use or meaning.

It is at this moment that the value of the second method becomes clear. A teacher can also begin by giving attention first to the general principles of organization, in other words, by insisting that writing is a problem in communication of ideas. He can teach the student that communication means ideas in a sensible and easily recognized order, that the task of the writer in which thoughts are conceived by the mind. In practice, this will mean emphasis on structure in the whole composition and in the paragraph. It will mean synthetic outlining of one's own material and will involve training in recognizing the relationship of one's ideas. The details of grammar and sentence structure will then fall into proper perspective. The student will see that a bad sentence is not objectionable because some handbook says it is, but because it is a hindrance to clear communication. He will see that bad grammar is not an error similar to kicking one's hostess in the shins at a party, but that sub-standard grammar distracts the attention from the value of what is being said. In short, composition can be taught as a discipline of ideas and not as a linguistic mystery.

Of course, method for its own sake is quite as futile in the field of English as anywhere else. Unless one's devices are based on a philosophy of teaching composition, any method, no matter how bright and newly sprung from the brain of a Big Man in the Field, can be only winnowing of the wind. But it seems to me that the concept of composition as orderly communication, though not profound or very original, is at least an adequate approach to the task at hand.

Paul E. Reynolds
Rhode Island State College

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